



Paper No. 9

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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

In re Application of
Burns
Application No. 08/923,443
Filed: September 4, 1997
Attorney Docket No. 6649-101
For: SAND ANCHORS

On PETITION

This is a decision on the petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a), filed April 23, 2003, to revive the above-identified application.

The petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) is **dismissed**.

Any further petition to revive the above-identified application must be submitted within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. Extensions of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) are permitted. The reconsideration request should include a cover letter entitled "Petition under 37 CFR 1.137." This is **not** final agency action within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 704.

The revocation of power of attorney, filed April 23, 2003 has been entered and made of record.

This application became abandoned for failure to submit a timely reply to the non-final Office action, mailed February 24, 1998, which set an extendable three (3) month period for reply. No reply was received. Accordingly, this application became abandoned on May 25, 1998. A Notice of Abandonment was mailed on September 29, 1998.

A grantable petition to revive an abandoned application under 37 CFR 1.137(a) must be accompanied by (1) the required reply, unless previously filed. In a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to prosecute, the required reply may be met by the filing of a continuing application. In an application or patent, abandoned or lapsed for failure to pay the issue fee or any portion thereof, the required reply must be the payment of the issue fee or any outstanding balance thereof; (2) the petition fee as set forth in § 1.17(l); (3) a showing to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to this paragraph was unavoidable; and (4) any terminal disclaimer (and fee as set forth in § 1.20 (d)) required pursuant to paragraph (c) of this section. This petition does not satisfy requirements (1) and (3).

With respect to (1), petitioner has not submitted an acceptable reply to the February 24, 1998 non-final Office action. The enclosed copy of the February 24, 1998 non-final Office action should enable petitioner to craft a proper reply.

Regarding (3) above, petitioner has not shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the entire delay from the due date of the reply to the filing of a grantable petition was unavoidable.

The Commissioner may revive an abandoned application if the delay in responding to the relevant outstanding Office requirement is shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner to have been "unavoidable". 35 USC § 133. Decisions on reviving abandoned applications have adopted the reasonably prudent person standard in determining if the delay was unavoidable:

The word unavoidable ... is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business. It permits them in the exercise of this care to rely upon the ordinary and trustworthy agencies of mail and telegraph, worthy and reliable employees, and such other means and instrumentalities as are usually employed in such important business. If unexpectedly, or through the unforeseen fault or imperfection of these agencies and instrumentalities, there occurs a failure, it may properly be said to be unavoidable, all other conditions of promptness in its rectification being present.

Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (Comm'r Pat. 1887)(the term "unavoidable" "is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business"); In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (D.C. Cir. 1912); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (Comm'r Pat. 1913). In addition, decisions on revival are made on a "case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account." Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982). Finally, a petition to revive an application as unavoidably abandoned cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing the cause of the unavoidable delay. Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 5 USPQ2d 1130 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

Specifically, an application is "unavoidably" abandoned only where petitioner, or counsel for petitioner, takes all action necessary for a proper response to the outstanding Office action, but through the intervention of unforeseen circumstances, such as failure of mail, telegraph, telefacsimile, or the negligence of otherwise reliable employees, the response is not timely received in the Office. Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31 (Comm'r Pat. 1887).

In the instant case, petitioner has failed to provide adequate evidence that the delay was unavoidable within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.137(a). Petitioner asserts that the delay in filing a reply to the February 24, 1998 non-final Office action was unavoidable because petitioner's former attorney failed to prosecute the application. The petition states that petitioner and petitioner's former patent attorney reached an agreement that the former attorney would deal directly with a company that was producing petitioner's invention and together, they would decide how to proceed with the prosecution of the application. Petitioner allowed his former attorney and a company in interest to control prosecution of the application.

Petitioner was represented by a registered practitioner. The Office must rely on the actions or inactions of the duly authorized and voluntarily chosen representatives of applicants, and the

applicants are bound by the consequences of those actions or inactions. Link v. Wabash, 370 U.S. 626, 633-34 (1962). If the attorney made any errors, petitioners are bound by such errors.¹

The attorney must act reasonably and prudently.

If [the] attorney somehow breach[es] his duty of care to plaintiff, then plaintiff may have certain other remedies available to him against his attorney. He cannot, however, ask the court to overlook [the attorney's] action or inaction with regard to the patent application. He hired the [attorney] to represent him. [The attorney's] actions must be imputed to him.²

The Seventh Circuit has stated,

The other assumption is that, if the complainants failed in their application through the negligence of their attorney, the delay would be unavoidable, which is wholly unwarranted in the law. It is of the very nature of negligence that it should not be unavoidable, otherwise it would not be actionable. The negligence of the attorney would be the negligence of the [client]. The purpose of the statute was to put an end to such pleas, and there would be no limit to a renewal of these applications if every application, however remote, could be considered under the plea of negligence of attorneys, by whom their business is generally conducted.³

The United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit has stated,

If we were to hold that an attorney's negligence constitutes good cause for failing to meet a PTO requirement, the PTO's rules could become meaningless. Parties could regularly allege attorney negligence in order to avoid an unmet requirement.⁴

¹ See California Med. Products v. Technol Med. Products, 921 F. Supp. 1219, 1259 (D. Del. 1995) (citing Smith v. Diamond, 209 U.S.P.Q. 1091, 1093 (D.D.C. 1981) (citing Link v. Walbash Railroad Co., 370 U.S. 626, 8 L. Ed. 2d 734, 82 S. Ct. 1386 (1962))).

² Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 317, 5 U.S.P.Q. 2d (BNA) 1130 (citing Link v. Walbash Railroad Co., 370 U.S. 626, 8 L. Ed. 2d 734, 82 S. Ct. 1386 (1962)) ("Petitioner voluntarily chose his attorney as his representative in the action and he cannot now avoid the consequences of the acts or omissions of this freely selected agent ... Each party is deemed bound by the acts of his lawyer-agent and is considered to have 'notice of all facts, notice of which can be charged upon the attorney.'" (emphasis added); Inryco, Inc. v. Metropolitan Engineering Co., Inc., 708 F.2d 1225, 1233 (7th Cir. 1983) ("Courts hesitate to punish a client for its lawyers gross negligence, especially when the lawyer affirmatively misled the client" but "if the client freely chooses counsel, it should be bound to counsel's actions."); see also Wei v. State of Hawaii, 763 F. 2d 370, 372 (9th Cir. 1985); LeBlanc v. I.N.S., 715 F.2d 685, 694 (1st Cir. 1983)). See also Smith v. Diamond, 209 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 1091 (D. D.C. 1981).

³ Lay v. Indianapolis Brush & Broom Mfg. Co., 120 F. 831, 836 (1903).

⁴ Huston v. Ladner, 973 F.2d 1564, 1567, 23 U.S.P.Q.2D (BNA) 1910 (Fed. Cir. 1992).

In the instant case, the former attorney did not act as reasonable and prudent person in relation to his most important business. Petitioner abdicated control of his invention to the former attorney and now requests relief because the former attorney decided not to prosecute the application. Delay resulting from a failure in communication between a petitioner and his or her registered practitioner is a delay binding upon petitioner. See In re Kim, 12 USPQ2d 1595 (Comm'r Pat. 1988); Ray v. Lehman, 55 F.3d 606, 610, 34 USPQ2d 1786, 1789 (Fed. Cir. 1989). As stated above, petitioner is bound by his attorney's actions.

Petitioner asserts that his wife's medical condition requires him to devote full-time efforts to her rehabilitation. However he was able to visit with the company in interest and discuss his invention/application with the company manager. The fact that petitioner could discuss his invention/ application with company officials on numerous occasions shows that full-time efforts were not expended to take care of petitioner's wife. Furthermore, preoccupation with other matters which took precedence over the above-identified application does not constitute unavoidable delay. See Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982).

The petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) is dismissed.

However, petitioner may still revive this application based on the unintentional standard of 37 CFR 1.137(b).

ALTERNATIVE VENUE

Petitioner is strongly encouraged to file a petition stating that the delay was unintentional. Public Law 97-247, § 3, 96 Stat. 317 (1982), which revised patent and trademark fees, amended 35 U.S.C. § 41(a)(7) to provide for the revival of an "unintentionally" abandoned application without a showing that the delay in prosecution or in late payment of an issue fee was "unavoidable." This amendment to 35 U.S.C. § 41(a)(7) has been implemented in 37 CFR 1.137(b). An "unintentional" petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) must be accompanied by the \$ 650.00 petition fee.

The filing of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) cannot be intentionally delayed and therefore must be filed promptly. A person seeking revival due to unintentional delay can not make a statement that the delay was unintentional unless the entire delay, including the delay from the date it was discovered that the application was abandoned until the filing of the petition to revive under 37 CFR 1.137(b), was unintentional. A statement that the delay was unintentional is not appropriate if petitioner intentionally delayed the filing of a petition for revival under 37 CFR 1.137(b). For petitioner's convenience, a blank copy of Petition for Revival of Application For Patent Abandoned Unintentionally under 37 CFR 1.137(b) is enclosed.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

By mail: MAIL STOP PETITION
Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria VA 22313-1450

By facsimile: (703) 308-6916
Attn: Office of Petitions

By hand: Office of Petitions
2201 South Clark Place
Crystal Plaza 4, Suite 3C23
Arlington, VA 22202

Telephone inquiries concerning this decision should be directed to the undersigned at (703) 308-6712.



E. Shirene Willis
Senior Petitions Attorney
Office of Petitions

enclosures: copy of the February 24, 1998 non-final Office action

copy of September 29, 1998 Notice of Abandonment

blank copy of Petition for Revival of Application For Patent Abandoned
Unintentionally under 37 CFR 1.137(b)

Privacy Act Statement